DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 595 CG 027 415

AUTHOR Ledez, John
TITLE A Learning-Teaching Approach to Behaviour Management in Schools.
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Australian Guidance and Counselling Association (5th, Hobart, Tasmania, September 27-30, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *Behavior Modification; *Behavior Problems; Children; Delinquency; Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Prevention; *Social Reinforcement; *Social Values; *Student Behavior; *Student Development; Youth Problems
IDENTIFIERS Australia; *Behavior Management

ABSTRACT

The high levels of juvenile crime in Australian society are reflected in the schools. This paper suggests a number of issues and concepts on juvenile misbehavior which should be of interest to educators. Due to rapid changes, there is less agreement on the foundational principles of culture. It is argued that educators need to help society redefine principles, values, and beliefs and help ensure that cultural principles are accepted and respected. Since young people's strengths and limitations have changed also--thus making students more difficult to educate--a process of behavior management is suggested as a valuable contribution to education. Such approaches must promote appropriate behavior, rather than simply responding to inappropriate actions. Some models address youth crime by educating the public about the cause and prevention of inappropriate behavior, reducing access to drugs, and other strategies. Most importantly, such models can enhance the personal growth of children and young people and foster their desire to do the right thing. Other ways to further personal growth include building a sense of community, which can motivate youth to participate in constructive activities. There are many models designed to engender positive behavior and which can guide school communities in encouraging the development of prosocial orientations. (Contains 17 references.) (RJM)

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A Learning - Teaching Approach to Behaviour Management in Schools

John Ledez, Faculty of Education
University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba

ED 404 595

There has been a requirement for schools in Queensland in recent years to develop behaviour management plans. The concept of Supportive School Environment has been promoted in relation to behaviour management, which is highly desirable. However contact with schools indicates that in many cases the planning has largely been at the level of establishing procedures which will be followed in response to various types of misbehaviour. This in itself has been helpful, but there is a need to consider more fundamental issues relating to the occurrence of inappropriate behaviour in schools. This paper suggests a number of issues and concepts which require the attention of educators who are interested in this area.

WHAT IS THE PRESENT SITUATION

High levels of juvenile crime are evident in society; in schools we see some of the correlates of this. There is much less acceptance of what used to be considered to be the foundational principles of our culture. As a society we have changed quite considerable in the past 3-4 decades. I suggest we are in a transition stage: many of the beliefs, values, principles which used to be highly valued as essential components of our culture have declined in influence. Some other principles - justice, equity, tolerance, which are desirable, have been given considerable attention, but at present we have not developed a clear and widely accepted set of principles which serve to direct our aspirations and behaviour, and as a society we have not developed the processes whereby those ethical/moral principles are taught, absorbed and internalised through our society by all individuals. So as a society, we have 2 questions to address:

i) What are the principles, values, beliefs which will be the essential elements of our culture and which will direct the lives and behaviour of groups and individual members of our society?

ii) How will we ensure that these principles of our culture are accepted and respected - how will we establish and maintain - ie. teach them?

My suggestion is that educators have a very important responsibility in relation to both questions. Education has a somewhat new role to play. Previously we have contributed to the maintenance of a well established culture and the accompanying set of principles. Now we must first contribute to the establishment of the elements of a new culture as well as ensuring that those principles are respected and maintained.

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Douglas Heath (1994) is one researcher and author whose work supports this argument. Heath (1994 p. 4) identifies various ways in which students' strengths and limitations have changed.

THE RESPONSE

These and other characteristics result in young people being more difficult to educate. While Heath acknowledges that the changes both in the characteristics of young people, and in the nature of US society have not necessarily been thoroughly investigated, I suggest that we, and teachers in our schools, can relate to the issues to which he draws attention. One example he gives for instance (1994 p. 5), "What happens to the eight-year-old boy who asked me who his parents would be next year?" Graduate students in some of my courses which deal with student adjustment, counselling etc, frequently draw attention to similar examples.

This section will therefore examine some aspects of the way we have addressed inappropriate behaviour. As a starting point it is worth noting the terminology used, namely, 'Behaviour Management'. This may be an entirely appropriate term, but it does suggest several things about the approach we take; there are other possibilities. The term obviously indicates a focus on behaviour and it is reasonable to assume, on observable behaviour - what kids actually do in classrooms and playgrounds, rather than on less readily observable aspects of student functioning. One can just raise the question, is this the most desirable, appropriate, or effective emphasis?

It can be asked to what extent this approach reflects the on-going influence of a behavioural approach generally, even though we now say that psychology has long since 'gone cognitive'? I suggest that behavioural models can and have made valuable contributions to various aspects of education, including the present topic, but we need also to investigate carefully the implications of concepts from other sections of psychology. In addition, I suggest that when behavioural approaches have been applied in education, the deficiencies have not been the result of the models as such, but have occurred because in schools we have seldom used these models accurately. The term also obviously emphasises management. What does this say about our current society? It is reasonable to suggest, even though this is a topic which could be researched in itself, that the process of management currently attracts more attention and status than was the case some decades ago. This may be quite appropriate in the society generally, but in what sense, and to what extent, is the behaviour of children and young people, something that can be regarded as being 'managed', by whom ever? Are those processes normally included in the category of management, the most appropriate way of conceptualising the processes of influencing 'behaviour'? I would like to suggest that as alternatives we consider 'teaching' and 'counselling'.

As we attempt to address this issue of student behaviour it is useful to consider the various possible ways of conceptualising and approaching the issue, because it is likely that schools need to draw upon a variety of theoretical models. What are some possibilities for promoting prosocial behaviour?

Though obvious, it must be noted that it is essential that we plan to promote appropriate behaviour, rather than simply respond to the inappropriate. Various theoretical models can be applied in both ways. Clearly, behaviour is and can be influenced by its consequences. There is a place for behavioural approaches, but serious efforts must be taken to ensure that these principles are used correctly. This may have important implications for the services our members provide for schools. For some time now behaviourists have emphasised the need for schools to focus on the positive (Wheldall & Glynn 1989) an aspect of behaviour management programmes which is not always particularly evident.

Social skills training approaches can be seen to derive from a behavioural approach, and to move us towards cognitive and social psychology. Training in inter-personal problem solving skills for instance, was shown long ago to have the potential to enhance prosocial behaviour (Spivack and Shure, 1974).

We of course are very aware of the whole school, and supportive environment approaches and there is good reason to believe that this is a very valuable approach to pursue. Unfortunately, however, one cannot be confident that the essential elements of this approach have been as widely understood and taken up by schools as one might hope. Why might this be the case? One practical issue is simply that in these times of quite rapid and very considerable change teachers and school administrators are overwhelmed with a constant series of demands on their time because of new organisational arrangements. How frequently one hears the plea just to be able to get on with teaching - with doing one's job. This would seem to have obvious implications for administration, but also for researchers and AGCA members, in relation, for instance to teacher stress and the functioning of the school community.

Another possible approach to 'behaviour management' broadens the field even further and suggests the need for educators to take a different and more influential role in our changing society. This can be referred to as a Public Health Model (Guetzloe, 1992). Guetzloe suggests that primary prevention would involve such things as educating the general public about the causes and prevention of inappropriate behaviour, reducing access to drugs, gun control and regulating exposure of children to violence on television. Few teachers would question the role of the wider community in relation to the origins of inappropriate student behaviour. On the whole, however, educators as a professional group have seldom attempted to exert much influence on the functioning of our wider society, whereas other professional associations (eg. the AMA and APS) frequently take a well publicised and proactive stance. Should educators at the level of both professional associations, such as the AGCA, and of individual schools, be having more to say to our community concerning 'behaviour management'? I suggest there is good reason to think that we should. The way of life in the wider community affects the work of teachers, but in addition, few professional groups are in a better position to see the adverse effects on our children of some aspects of our current way of life. We can be disturbed by the very nasty things that are happening at times in schools. We understandably

feel sorry for those who suffer as a result of the severely inappropriate behaviour and the teachers who have to cope with it, but we should also feel sorry for the perpetrators of these 'offences'. Because we (our society) are allowing them to learn grossly inappropriate behaviour, and because we are failing to teach them appropriate behaviour and lifestyles, we are condemning a considerable proportion of our children to wasting their lives, causing distress for those around them, but also producing frequently some horrific life experiences for themselves. In operant learning terms it's an interesting example of the importance of contingency. Our 'difficult' young people are failing to see the link between their inappropriate behaviour and their subsequent unpleasant experiences; and similarly people in our community generally do not perceive the contingency between the life style they/we endorse or accept, and the much lamented results such as juvenile crime. However most teachers accurately perceive the links. Surely we therefore have a responsibility both to the community and to these poorly adjusted young people, to have something constructive and helpful to say. This, I suggest, should constitute an important future focus for the AGCA.

ENHANCING PERSONAL GROWTH

Consideration of this public health model leads naturally to an awareness of the importance of ways of enhancing the personal growth and genuine maturation of our children and young people. A simple idea which can be seen to be basic here concerns control of a person's behaviour. It seems to be an unspoken assumption underlying many behaviour management programmes that one can control a young person's behaviour. Certainly it is possible to stop or prevent a person doing something, though you might have to lock him up or some such to do so. Calls in our society for more severe penalties for offenders indicate evidence of this thinking. However, while it may be possible to stop inappropriate behaviour, it is impossible to make a person do what is considered to be the right thing. There must be some motivation, or at least willingness on the individual's part to do the right thing. How frequently young people released from detention centres return to a life of offending. Approaches to what is currently termed behaviour management therefore need to take on far more emphasis on motivating children and young people to want to behave in prosocial ways. In this context again, the AGCA project is most encouraging.

WHAT ARE SOME ELEMENTS OF THE PROCESS OF ENHANCING PERSONAL GROWTH?

This section will suggest a number of topics which should be considered in relation to the issue of enhancing personal growth and the development of prosocial behaviour.

Sense of community

McMillan and Chavis (1986) proposed a model of sense of community having four components: membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection.

While further research is required concerning the application of this concept, research by Pretty and others (1994, 1995) indicates a significant relationship

between sense of community and adolescent loneliness, and adolescent subjective well-being. They suggest that sense of community may prove to be an important component of effective prevention programmes. Certainly to promote desirable behaviour in schools and the wider community, we need to have children and young people involved in constructive activities, which requires that young people are keen to participate in such activities. A sense of community may be an important factor influencing such motivation to participate.

Another finding in the area of social psychology may add to the findings concerning sense of community, though this also will require further investigation. Tom Tyler (1990) reports that people are willing to accept the authority of a group if they perceive that they are accepted as members of that group. Some information obtained from a small number of adolescent males in a local detention centre is also of relevance in this context. These young offenders were interviewed concerning their experience of school. It was anticipated that their assessment of schools and teachers would be considerably different from that of 'average' non-offending adolescents. Surprisingly this was not the case. Most responses concerning such questions as the degree of fairness with which they were treated by teachers were similar to what one would expect from average students. The notable difference concerned the perception of membership of the school community. Offenders reported that they had not felt that there was a place for them, or that they 'belonged', in the school which they had last attended. Therefore, while considerably more investigation is required, there is reasonable indication that sense of community and associated issues may be a useful concept.

Other research concerning the development of prosocial behaviour should also be considered. The present distressing behaviour problems in our schools and wider society is indication that our present society is not very effective in promoting prosocial behaviour. There is considerable evidence that cultures vary in this regard (Bronfenbrenner, 1970; Whiting & Whiting, 1973, 1975; Graves & Graves, 1983). Characteristics related to high levels of prosocial behaviour include factors such as emphasis by significant others on consideration for others, sharing and group orientation; and a situation where children at quite young ages are expected to perform quite important tasks and make an important contribution to the group or family welfare. (Eisenberg & Mussen 1989) These would seem to have important implications for school communities, while a further interesting issue concerns the role of instruction or 'preaching' concerning prosocial behaviour. Some argue that the behaviour which children observe is the important thing (Bryan & Walbeck, 1970). However other research also indicates that what we tell children, what we might refer to as teaching or 'preaching' can have a beneficial effect, even though such approaches tend to have been dismissed of recent years. (Examples are provided by Rushton, 1975; Grusec, Saas-Kortsaak, and Simutis, 1978). Findings such as these indicate that there is considerable potential for school communities to put in place programmes designed to encourage the development of prosocial orientation and behaviours. An example is provided by the programme conducted in the San Francisco Bay area reported by Solomon, Watson, Battistick & Schaps (1986).

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